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ASIA-PACIFIC COALITION
FOR EAST TIMOR

A Proposal to Declare

DECEMBER 7 : INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY FOR EAST TIMOR

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Context

20 years ago, East Timor was brutally invaded by its giant neighbor, Indonesia. Since then, this tiny yet oil-rich nation of brave and gentle Maubere people have suffered under the heels of wanton disregard for their human, economic and political rights. More than a quarter of the entire population have died or have been killed since 1975. That is at least a staggerring 200,000 corpses. Its rich natural resources have been recklessly plundered: its sandalwood reserves maimed, coffee produce wasted and oil deposits blighted by Indonesia in partnership with even other governments such as Australia.

Even then, the valiant resistance of the East Timorese people has stalemated Indonesia's design to totally assimilate this former Portuguese colonial territory. The resistance has been on various fronts: the hills, the streets, the universities, the media, the halls of the United Nations, the ears of diplomats -- the hearts and minds of peoples.

Fuelling, inspiring the East Timorese people's struggle is a burgeoning international solidarity movement that has helped carry the torch of freedom for the Maubere outside their shores. This broad-based movement has likewise underscored the significance of solidarity relations and activities to push forward a people's righteous cause. It is also this movement which has helped propagate the reality that is East Timor in the confines of other freedom-loving peoples the world over. It is no small matter that international solidarity has belied the avowed legitimacy of Indonesia's annexation of the territory.

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Significance of the Declaration

December 7, 1975 was the day Indonesia invaded East Timor. 1995 is the 20th year of that invasion.

1995 is also the 50th year of the birth of the United Nations.

December 7 is also three days away from December 10, which is the United Nations Human Rights Day.

The United Nations has never recognized the Indonesian annexation of East Timor. But it has not provided teeth to this non-recognition except for paper resolutions of condemnations. It has not sent any peacekeeping force as it did in Bosnia, Haiti, and Iraq where it even sent a multinational armed force in the lopsided Gulf War.

The solidarity movement, has meanwhile always culminated its activities at the end of the year particularly every December 7.

December 7, 1995 presents the United Nations or its respective member-states an opportunity to galvanize its rhetoric into a more symbolical --and relevant action. The United Nations can declare December 7 henceforth an International Day of Solidarity for East Timor as it had done with the Palestinian people every November 29.

If this is done, December 7 will forever be etched in the annals of humankind's history not only as the day of Indonesia's cowardly invasion of East Timor, but also as the world's peoples commitment for its eventual liberation. It will likewise provide a focus for international efforts for the solution of the East Timor issue.

Mechanics

This proposal will be simultaneosuly presented to the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on East Timor in Lisbon this June, the different international solidarity groups through the International Federation for East Timor (IFET) and the various East Timorese resistance groups.

The Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor (APCET) is the proponent.

APCET will lobby the Lisbon parliamentray meeting to adopt the proposal so its participants can likewsie propose, support or even initiate this within the United Nations system. Perhaps, the Portuguese government, the Scandinavian countries or even the former Portuguese colonies can co-cponsor this resolution in the UN. Even then, APCET will likewise lobby all international solidarity groups to support the proposal and to even proceed to issue the December 7 declaration unilaterally if the United Nations fail to do so. Ideally however, both the United Nations and its peoples through the solidarity groups can jointly do this.

The Solidarity groups' declaration can transpire in Manila on December 7, amidst the Human Rights Week celebrations. The event can be attended by international luminaries including East Timorese leaders. Discussions on the significance of the day and its context can be taken up in a one or two-day conference culminating in December 7.

Manila is an appropriate setting for this unilateral declaration as this was the site of the controversial APCET conference last year that sparked a wave of recognition of and solidarity to the East Timorese people's plight in the region and the world.

APCET is also admittedly a milestone in the international solidarity movement for East Timor specially as it was initiated by other South peoples and transpiring for the first time in the same region where East Timor is located.

December 7 Program

All solidarity groups will undertake appropriate activities towards this declaration.

Hopefully, the United Nations will declare this as such too.

APCET will sponsor a "declaration day" in Manila after a two-day conference tracing the context, history and reasons for such. A concert will accompany the culminating activity. Local groups will be asked to perform. East Timorese and other international artists will be invited.

The Philippine Solidarity for East Timor (PHILSETI) will likewise conduct parallel activities in campuses, media and with local legislators. It may ask its allies in Congress to likewise sponsor a resolution to this effect.

All parliamentarians the world over can likewise be asked to sponsor something like this then. Perhaps, the Parliamentarians for East Timor (PET) can coordinate this.